

DISPOSABLE CUP LID WITH INTEGRAL TOOTHPICK

This U.S. non-provisional patent application claims the benefit of and/or priority to U.S. provisional patent application serial number 60/454,098 filed on March 12, 2003 entitled "Disposable Dinnerware With Integral Toothpick", the entire contents of which is specifically incorporated herein by reference.

TECHNICAL FIELD OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates generally to disposable drink cup lids and, more particularly, to disposable cup lids having an integral toothpick formed therewith.

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

It is known in restaurants and other places of public accommodation to provide toothpicks for the use of patrons. Such toothpicks are usually, but not necessarily, individually sealed in plastic or paper and placed in a small jar or other dispenser for the convenience of patrons. In some situations, the prior art method of dispensing toothpicks to the public is found to be inconvenient.

For example, in many restaurants toothpicks are not provided at the table, but rather are dispensed at a central location, such as the hostess stand or cash

register. As a result, some patrons may forget to take a toothpick with them when they leave or may be unaware of the location of the toothpick dispenser.

Furthermore, diners at fast-food restaurants (particularly when using the drive-through window) are generally not provided with toothpicks. Moreover, because toothpicks are inherently small in nature, they are likely to get lost if they are even provided to the patron. They are also an added expense for the business owner.

There is therefore a need for a convenient manner of providing toothpicks to diners. The present invention is directed toward meeting this need. This need and others are accomplished through application of the principles of the subject invention and/or as embodied in one or more various forms and/or structures such as are shown and/or described herein.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

The present invention relates to disposable cup lids (such as those used to seal the tops of cups used to dispense drinks in restaurants) having a toothpick retention portion integrally formed therewith. The toothpick retention portion is configured to releasably retain a toothpick. The disposable cup lid may take several forms such as for various types for hot and cold drink cups.

In one form of the present invention, the toothpick is contained within a recess in the cup lid and attached thereto by means of a securing slit. Pulling the toothpick away from the lid causes its release from the securing slit so that the

toothpick may be used. The securing slit also allows return receipt of the used toothpick for disposal with the cup lid or storage for later use.

The cup lid is preferably formed of a disposable material such as plastic. Of course, other materials suitable to carry out the principles of the present invention may be used.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

FIG. 1 is a top plan view of an exemplary embodiment of a cup lid supporting a toothpick in accordance with the principles of the subject invention.

FIG. 2 is a partial cross-sectional view of the preferred embodiment of FIG. 1 taken along section line 2-2.

FIG. 3 is a partial cross-sectional view of the preferred embodiment of FIG. 1 taken along section line 3-3.

FIG. 4 is a top plan view of another exemplary embodiment of a cup lid supporting a toothpick in accordance with the principles of the subject invention.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

For the purposes of promoting an understanding of the principles of the subject invention, reference will now be made to the embodiments illustrated in the drawings and specific language will be used to describe the same. It will nevertheless be understood that no limitation of the scope of the invention is

thereby intended, and alterations and/or modifications in the illustrated devices, and further applications of the principles of the invention as illustrated therein are herein contemplated as would normally occur to one skilled in the art to which the invention pertains.

A first exemplary embodiment of a cup lid in accordance with the principles of the present invention is illustrated in FIGS. 1, 2 and 3 and indicated generally at 10. As will be familiar to those skilled in the art, the cup lid 10 is of the type typically manufactured from plastic and used to seal the top of a typically disposable cup containing a liquid drink. Although a specific cup lid design is illustrated in the figures, the present invention comprehends say type of cup lid design that would include the present novel toothpick holder or retainer of the present invention. As such, a drink lid in accordance with the principles of the present invention may be configured for use in containing hot beverages such as coffee within a hot beverage cup, or it may be configured for use in containing cold or lukewarm beverages such as soda within a cold or lukewarm beverage cup. The cup lid is preferable formed from plastic or other suitable material that can carry out the principles of the present invention.

The cup lid 10 is defined by a body 11 generally shaped as shown. The body 11 includes a pocket, trough, slot, slit or the like (collectively, pocket) 12 formed therein. The pocket 12 is preferably formed integral with the body 11 during the molding or manufacturing process used to form the cup lid 10. The configuration of the pocket 12 is such as to accommodate a toothpick. As such, the pocket 12 is generally elongated in the direction of the plane of the lid body

11 and defines a linear axis along the same direction. The pocket 12 is shown in FIGS. 1-3 as generally rectangular-shaped with respect to the plane of the lid body 11, but may take other shapes that are non-rectangular such as ovoid or the like. A cross-section of the depth dimension of the pocket 12 is shown in FIG. 3 and is thus preferably arcuate-shaped. Again, other shapes may be used if desired. A rounded or arcuate shape is preferable from a molding standpoint. Various configurations/dimensions are contemplated that may retain, stow, store, hold or accommodate a toothpick.

At some point along its length of the pocket 12 is a retention mechanism or device 15 that is adapted, configured and/or operable to releasably retain a toothpick within the pocket 12. The retention mechanism 15 is preferably embodied as one or more ridges, protrusions, ledges, or the like 14 (collectively, ridges). The ridges 14 are preferably molded integral with the cup lid 10 (body 11 and pocket 12), providing at least a partial barrier to access to the pocket 12. In a preferred embodiment, two such ridges 14 are provided in opposing relationship each of which is generally arc-shaped. It should be appreciated that the retention mechanism 15 may be provided through one or more ridges 14. Moreover, more than one retention mechanism may be provided along the length of the pocket 12.

A slit, slot or the like 16 (collectively, slit) is formed between the two ridges 14. Alternatively, the slit 16 could be formed between an edge of a single ridge 14 and an edge of the pocket 12 (in a single ridge embodiment of a retention mechanism, not shown). The pocket 12 is formed to a convenient size to contain

a toothpick 18 therein. The slit 16 is configured to receive and/or accommodate the cross-sectional dimensions of a toothpick 18. Thus, while a round (in cross-section) toothpick 18 is shown within the slit 16, at least a portion of the slit 16 may be formed to accommodate a square (in cross-section) or other shape (in cross-section) for the toothpick. Particularly, the slit 16 is formed of an ingress and egress portion and a retention portion each of which is dimensioned accordingly.

Because of a semi-flexible nature of the ridges 14, the ridges 14 will flex in a direction that causes the ingress and egress portion of the slit 16 to widen when a toothpick 18 is pressed into the slit 16. Similarly, the ridges 14 will return substantially to their original configuration after the flex-inducing force of the toothpick 18 is removed (as when the toothpick is fully received into the retention portion of the slit 16, or as when the toothpick has been removed from the retention portion of the slit 16), thus returning the slit 16 (ingress/egress portion) to roughly its original dimensions.

By forming the cup lid 10 such that the slit 16 has a width smaller than the nominal width of the toothpick 18, the toothpick 18 will be retained in the pocket 12 until it is pulled therefrom causing the toothpick 18 to press upon the slit 16. This may be conveniently accomplished by applying pressure on the opposite side of the cup lid 10 underneath the toothpick 18. Similarly, the toothpick 18 may be placed into the pocket 12 by applying pressure from above while the toothpick 18 is positioned on top of the slit 16. Toothpicks for use with the

present invention may be formed from any suitable material, such as wood or plastic.

Referring to FIG. 4, there is depicted an alternative or second embodiment of a cup lid generally designated 10a. The cup lid 10a includes most, if not all, of the features of the cup lid 10. As such, like features have the same numeral but with an "a" designation. These features are discussed above.

The cup lid 10a includes a pocket 12a that is generally in the same shape or configuration as its counterpart pocket 12 and may be dimensioned as indicated with respect to pocket 12. Pocket 12a, however, includes an ovoid depression 20 at one end thereof for receipt of a fingertip, instrument or the like. The ovoid depression 20 may also be placed between the end of the pocket 12a and the slit/retention mechanism 16a. Moreover, it should be appreciated that the other end of the pocket 12a may include a like ovoid depression if desired (but not shown). The ovoid depression 20 is preferably dimensioned to accommodate a fingertip. Thus, a user can press down the toothpick 18a within the ovoid depression area 20 to cause the other end of the toothpick 18a to rise up from the pocket 12a. The ovoid depression 20 allows easy egress of the toothpick 18a.

It should be appreciated by those having ordinary skill in the art that the present cup lid with an integral toothpick/toothpick retainer provides great convenience to a user by supplying a toothpick with a drink.

While the invention has been illustrated and described in detail in the drawings and foregoing description, the same is to be considered as illustrative

and not restrictive in character, it being understood that only the preferred embodiment has been shown and described and that all changes and/or modifications that come within the spirit of the invention are described and protected.